

Conference on Obesity and the Built Environment
Speech, Briefing Q&A's, and Background Document
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On behalf of the Federal Highway Administration and Administrator Mary Peters particularly, I want to thank you for the invitation to address this conference on "Obesity and the Built Environment."

This event gives FHWA an opportunity to join with the public health community to discuss our shared goals and challenges. It also gives me the chance to let you know about what we are already doing to promote "livable communities." These are broadly defined as places where people of all ages can walk, bike, and play; where farms, forests, and green spaces are protected; and where parents spend less time in traffic and more time with their children.

We support the public health community as they strive to identify effective strategies to reduce the incidence of obesity in America. This is a difficult problem we face as a Nation. For FHWA, it is yet another challenge as we try to carry out our multiple responsibilities for conserving our environment, and enhancing our communities, while ensuring access and mobility for a multitude of customers. But our programs show that we can help in this quest.

Transportation policy and programs can help promote physical activity in our communities. Every man, woman, and child in our country has a right to expect us to provide a safe, accessible, affordable, and reliable transportation system – that meets varied mobility needs—while preserving as many options and resources as we can for future generations.

Since 1992, we, along with our State and local partners, increased Federal spending on bicycle and pedestrian projects by almost 20 times. Through landmark FHWA programs like Transportation Enhancements and Recreational Trails, as well as the rest of the Federal-Aid Highway Program, we invested more than \$422 million in 2003 alone. And our Federal Lands Highway Program has been crucial to providing access to recreational areas in our national parks and other places.

These investments have helped us to nearly double the reported number of walking and biking trips made in this country, while reducing the number of injuries and fatalities by more than 15 percent between 1993 and 2003. We have extensive networks of pedestrian and bicycle facilities in every State, including sidewalks, bike lanes, and trails. But there are other places where we need to work together through effective transportation planning to provide places for people to walk and bicycle.

The transportation planning process is key to ensuring that each community makes sound decisions on its built environment. Good planning decisions lead to good design and thus opportunities to improve America's physical health. These decisions are rightly made at the State and community levels, and we encourage you to work with your local officials to promote the types of projects that will achieve community public health goals.

Let me end by giving you a sense of our support for programs that foster public health and physical activity in our agency.

- We have a strong Bicycle and Pedestrian Program.

- In June 1999 we established the **Pedestrian and Bicyclist Information Center** - a national clearinghouse to provide technical assistance to professionals and advocates - which we expect to continue through our reauthorization proposal.
- In February 2000 we issued “**Design Guidance**” that calls for transportation decision makers to routinely consider the need of bicyclists and pedestrians.
- We are presently drafting a ten-year progress report on the **Federal Action Plan of the National Bicycling and Walking Study** which was originally issued in 1994.

Some of our other activities include:

- In pending reauthorization legislation, we support continued and increased programs that foster physical activity – Recreational Trails and TE, at annual average funding levels of \$60 million and \$545 million respectively.
- We also support significantly increased funding for transportation planning – 53% in our proposal for metropolitan planning – to enable citizens and governments to do a better job of analyzing trends and challenges, including obesity, and developing programs that meet multiple needs.
- With the help of many in this room, we are developing a web-based publication called “**What Works: Transportation and Public Health**” to help citizens visualize and communicate to their transportation officials that good design can enhance physical activity; and
- FHWA is working with the Departments of Health and Human Services, Interior, Agriculture, and the Army to develop a **Memorandum of Understanding** to promote public health through recreation.

As a longer-term trend, I believe you will find FHWA and the US Department of Transportation:

- Becoming a stronger partner with public health professionals, local governments, and communities in developing healthier transportation solutions;
- Becoming more concerned about the impacts of transportation on communities, land use, and the natural environment;
- Investing in research and facilities that support various transportation solutions to improve public health outcomes.

I am optimistic that we together can develop policies, designs, and strategies that work to increase physical activity as a lifestyle of choice in America.